

A Comprehensive Guide for HR Leaders

Looking after the Carer's in your Organisation

This resource was developed by the team at **Hospice UK**, the national charity for hospices and end-of-life care.

Through our **Compassionate Employers Programme**, we give organisations the skills, knowledge, and resources that they need to effectively support their employees through terminal illness, caring responsibilities, and bereavement at work.

Did you know that approximately 1 in 8 employees in the UK are balancing paid work with unpaid caring responsibilities? These carers support ageing parents, partners with disabilities, children with special needs, or loved ones with chronic illnesses. But despite the scale and importance of this role, many workplaces still lack comprehensive and inclusive carers policies that truly support their employees.

As HR professionals and organisational leaders, it's crucial we move beyond basic flexibility and compliance. We need to create workplaces where carers of all genders, ages, backgrounds, and identities feel seen, supported, and empowered to thrive both at work and in their caring roles.

This guide is specially designed to help HR leaders, DEI specialists, and people managers create carers policies that are inclusive, responsive, and future-proof.

- ✓ It breaks down the key issues unpaid carers face in the workplace.
- ✓ It helps you design or review policies with equity and flexibility in mind.
- ✓ It includes a detailed **Carer Policy Inclusivity Checklist** that organisations can use to benchmark their support

This isn't just about good policy—it's about building a culture where carers don't have to choose between their jobs and their loved ones.

Carers face unique and complex challenges that impact their mental health, financial stability, and career progression. Many face stigma and invisibility in the workplace—often because caring is viewed as a “private” issue rather than a professional one.

Key challenges include:

- **Disproportionate impact on women and marginalised groups.** Women make up around 60% of unpaid carers, and carers from LGBTQ+ communities or ethnic minorities may experience additional barriers to support.
- **Unpredictable and intense time demands.** Caring responsibilities don't fit neatly into a 9-to-5 schedule, creating stress around deadlines, attendance, and availability.
- **Mental health strain and burnout.** Carers are at higher risk of stress, anxiety, and depression—often compounded by workplace pressures.
- **Financial consequences.** Many carers reduce hours, turn down promotions, or leave jobs entirely, affecting lifetime earnings and pension contributions.

What can HR do to support carers?

Creating an inclusive carers policy means going beyond the basics. It's about embedding carer awareness and support into the organisational culture, policies, and leadership mindset.

Here is a starting point for when developing your carer's policy:

- ✓ **Understanding the diversity of carers:** Recognising carers are not a monolith, but people with different needs based on gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and caring situations.
- ✓ **Flexible working arrangements:** Creating accessible and stigma-free options for flexible hours, remote work, and time off for care needs.
- ✓ **Carer-specific leave policies:** Introducing or enhancing 10 days of unpaid leave for carers, including emergency leave, respite leave, and longer-term care commitments.
- ✓ **Training and awareness:** Equipping managers and colleagues to recognise caring responsibilities, reduce stigma, and provide empathetic support.

- ✓ **Mental health and wellbeing:** Tailoring Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs), counselling, and peer support to the unique stresses carers face.
 - ✓ **Confidential disclosure:** Providing safe ways for employees to share caring roles and request accommodations without fear of judgement or career damage.
 - ✓ **Regular policy review:** Building mechanisms to collect carer feedback and update policies to reflect changing needs and legislation.
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✓ **Comprehensive Inclusivity Checklist for Carers Policies**

Here's a checklist of what a truly inclusive and ideal carers policy looks like. Use this checklist to audit your existing policy or design a new one:

- **✓ Policy language is inclusive:** Explicitly includes all genders, ages, sexual orientations, relationship types, and caring roles (parents, partners, siblings, friends, etc.)
 - **✓ Flexible working options:** Clear, accessible options for flexible hours, remote work, part-time roles, job-sharing, and compressed hours—without stigma or penalisation
 - **✓ Carer leave provisions:** Paid or unpaid leave for carers to attend appointments, emergencies, or respite care, with options to request extensions or phased returns
 - **✓ Mental health support:** Access to targeted mental health resources and counselling sensitive to carer stress, burnout, and isolation
 - **✓ Manager training:** Regular training for managers on carer awareness, communication, and reasonable adjustments
 - **✓ Introduce a 'right to disconnect' addendum for carers:** Allow carers to establish protected "off hours" without penalty or guilt.
 - **✓ Confidential disclosure process:** Safe and confidential channels for carers to disclose responsibilities and request support without risk to career progression
 - **✓ Awareness and communication:** Ongoing internal communications promoting carer resources, peer support groups, and policy updates
 - **✓ Support for younger carers:** Tailored recognition and support mechanisms acknowledging challenges younger employees may face.
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- **✓ Feedback and review:** Mechanisms for collecting carer input on policy effectiveness, with regular reviews and updates to keep policies relevant
 - **✓ Equity in progression:** Review all policies and practices that prevent carers from being unfairly disadvantaged in promotions, performance reviews, and professional development opportunities
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Download our free full guide and checklist and use this to create an inclusive and proactive policy for carers.

By making carers equality a priority, your organisation can reduce absenteeism, boost employee loyalty, and foster a culture of true inclusion.

For more information on improving HR policies for all employees, please reach out to compassionateemployers@hospiceuk.org.